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U.S. SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY

CONTACT: David Carle, 202-224-3693 VERMONT

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY
ON
A RESOLUTION ON EAST TIMOR

A year ago I doubt anyone here would have predicted that a settlement of East Timor's political status would be in sight.

While there are many obstacles and dangers ahead, we should take note of what has been accomplished. In the past year --

— President Suharto relinquished power.

— The Indonesian Government endorsed a ballot on autonomy, which is planned for August 8th.

— The United Nations, Indonesia, and Portugal are to sign an agreement today on the procedures for that vote.

— If the East Timorese people reject autonomy, there is every expectation that East Timor will be on the road to independence.

The Resolution that I, Senator Feingold, Senator Reed, Senator Harkin and others are introducing today recognizes the positive steps that have been taken.

But it also expresses our deep concern that since January, when Indonesian President Habibie expressed the willingness to consider independence for East Timor, violence and intimidation by anti-independence militias backed by members of the Indonesian military has increased dramatically.

The perpetrators of the violence want to sabotage the ballot on East Timor's future.

One of the people with us today, Mr. Franciso Da Costa, witnessed the April 6th massacre of some 57 people in the village of Liquica. He arrived here from East Timor yesterday.

An Op Ed article in today's New York Times by East Timorese lawyer Aniceto Lopez says it all. He wrote: "With arms, money and a license for reckless rampages, the militia leaders have openly threatened death to anyone opposed to continued Indonesian occupation." I received a report just hours ago that his house is surrounded and he has been threatened with death.

senator_leahy@leahy.senate.gov
http://www.senate.gov/~leahy/

Hundreds of East Timorese civilians have been killed, injured or disappeared. Thousands have fled their homes to escape the violence, and are struggling to survive. Food and medicines are in short supply because the Indonesian Government has severely restricted access.

This Resolution sounds an alarm. The situation is extremely fragile. The militias are sowing chaos and terror. Far stronger steps are needed by the Indonesian Government and military to rein in the paramilitary groups.

The Resolution calls on the President and Secretary of State to intensify their efforts to urge the Indonesian Government and military to disarm the paramilitary groups. This must be done.

Another recommendation we make is that the United States contribute to the U.N. Trust Fund which will set up polling booths and put people on the ground to monitor the vote. I plan to work with Senator McConnell who also supports this to try to obtain the funding as soon as possible.

The Resolution says that any agreement to sell or transfer military equipment to Indonesia should state that the equipment will not be used in East Timor. We would prefer that there be no military equipment. But at the very least, we do not want our equipment ending up in the hands of thugs who are trying to derail the vote.

We know from history how much blood can be shed in East Timor. Nobody -- not the Indonesian Government, not the Indonesian military, and certainly not the East Timorese people, benefits from a return to those days.